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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9847
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RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA PRIORITY 0177
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SUBJECT: ITALIAN VIEWS ON INTERNATIONAL RUBBER STUDY GROUP
SECRETARY GENERAL

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11. (U) On February 14, Econoff delivered reftel points outlining USG concerns regarding the performance of Dr. Hidde Smit, Secretary General of the International Rubber Study Group (IRSG), to Stefano Nicoletti, the Italian MFA official responsible for Italian participation in the IRSG. Nicoletti noted that concerns regarding Dr. Smit's performance had "been circulating" for some time, and appreciated our detailed enumeration of Smit's violations of the IRSG Constitution and operating rules, which "provide food for thought." Nicoletti said the GOI does not yet have a position on extending Dr. Smit's tenure as IRSG Secretary General for an additional year, adding that the GOI will not take a position until after consulting with the IRSG's other EU members and discussions at the EU's working-level group on basic commodities (the PROBA group). Nicoletti noted reftel allegations raise "serious concerns" which should be subject to "thorough examination" by IRSG members. Looking forward, Nicoletti asked if the USG has identified a candidate to replace Dr. Smit if his contract is not extended. He noted that if Dr. Smit's term is not extended to 2010, the IRSG's move from London to Singapore will coincide with the arrival of a new Secretary General. This situation makes it essential that the transition from Dr. Smit to his successor occur as smoothly as possible, something that will be facilitated by having a short list of candidates ready in the event Dr. Smit's contract is not extended.

12. (U) Comment. It is not surprising the GOI has decided to consult with the other EU members of the IRSG before taking a position on this issue. That said, Nicoletti clearly appreciated the seriousness of the allegations in reftel. Nicoletti's comments lead us to believe that efforts to secure Italian support for limiting Dr. Smit to his current contract will be strengthened by having a strong "Plan B," including a short list of candidates to replace Dr. Smit as Secretary General of the IRSG. End comment.

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